

Statement of Congressman Ron Kind
**Expressing the Condolences of the House of Representatives to the Families of the
Crew Members of the Columbia Shuttle Mission**
February 5, 2003

MR. SPEAKER,

I RISE TODAY TO OFFER CONDOLENCES TO THE FAMILIES AND FRIENDS OF THE SEVEN ASTRONAUTS ABOARD THE COLUMBIA ON ITS FATEFUL MISSION. WE SHARE THE SYMPATHIES OF ALL AMERICANS FOR THEIR DEDICATION AND BRAVERY IN SERVICE TO OUR NATION.

THIS TRAGEDY REMINDS US THAT SPACE TRAVEL IS ANYTHING BUT ROUTINE. WHEN WE WORK ON THE CUTTING EDGE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, PERFECTION IS NEVER GUARANTEED AND CHANCE IS ALWAYS A FACTOR NO MATTER HOW MUCH TIME, MONEY, AND EXPERTISE IS INVESTED. THAT IS WHY WE OWE A DEBT OF GRATITUDE THAT CAN NEVER BE REPAID TO THOSE BRAVE MEN AND WOMEN INVOLVED IN OUR SPACE PROGRAM FOR THE RISKS THEY TAKE TO EXPLORE OUR LAST REMAINING FRONTIER.

LAST DECEMBER, I VISITED KENNEDY SPACE CENTER IN FLORIDA AND TALKED TO SOME OF THE ENGINEERS AND ASTRONAUTS INVOLVED IN OUR SHUTTLE PROGRAM. I WALKED AWAY WITH A GREAT APPRECIATION OF HOW COMPLICATED AND DANGEROUS SPACE TRAVEL STILL REMAINS TODAY.

SOME MAY WONDER WHY WE NEED TO GO TO SPACE. I BELIEVE WE DO IT BECAUSE WE HAVE NO OTHER OPTION. SINCE OUR ANCESTORS FIRST INHABITED THIS PLANET WE HAVE ALWAYS HAD A NEED TO EXPLORE AND KNOW OUR SURROUNDINGS. WHETHER IT IS HIKING THE NEXT PLAIN, CLIMBING THE NEXT MOUNTAIN, SAILING THE NEXT OCEAN, OR CONQUERING THE SKIES, HUMAN NATURE DEMANDS THAT WE EXPLORE THE NEXT FRONTIER. SPACE IS THE ULTIMATE FRONTIER AND THE SHUTTLE MISSIONS NASA UNDERTAKES HELP EXPAND OUR BASE OF KNOWLEDGE FOR THE BENEFIT OF HUMANITY.

AS IN PAST TRAGEDIES, WE WILL LEARN FROM THIS ONE AND WE WILL GO ON. THE NASA SPACE PROGRAM IS THE MOST ADVANCED THE WORLD HAS EVER SEEN, AND OUR NATION'S LEADERSHIP IN THIS AREA BRINGS SCIENTIFIC BENEFITS, OPPORTUNITY, AND HOPE TO FUTURE GENERATIONS.

THE MYSTERY OF SPACE BRINGS UNKNOWN POSSIBILITIES, AND THE NOTION THAT WE MUST EXPLORE, IF FOR NOTHING OTHER THAN FOR THE SAKE OF EXPLORATION, REPRESENTS THE BEST OF HUMAN NATURE AND THE AMERICAN SPIRIT. THE SEVEN ASTRONAUTS WE LOST ON FEBRUARY 1st WERE EXPLORERS, AND OUR THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS GO OUT TO THEIR FAMILIES.